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M E M O R I A L

TO LEGISLATURE OF VIRGINIA.

ISSUED BY THE

Religious Society of Friends,

AT THEIR

HALF YEARLY MEETING,

HELD AT RICHMOND, 10TH M. 5TH, 1863.

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R I C H M O N D :

G E O R G E W . G A R Y , P R I N T E R .

1863.



# MEMORIAL.

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TO THE HONORABLE,

THE LEGISLATURE OF VIRGINIA :

Your petitioners, members of the Religious Society of Friends, (called Quakers,) desire respectfully to call your attention to that portion of the Governor's Message in which he recommends the repeal of the law, exempting certain Religious Denominations from military duty by payment of a tax.

In his remarks on the subject, the Governor, doubtless unintentionally, does great injustice to, at least, one of those sects, The Friends. He assumes that the payment of said tax is an acknowledgment on the part of those paying it, that some aid is due from them to the Government in the prosecution of this war: on the contrary, we have paid said tax under protest, it being one of the established principles of our Society from its rise to the present day, that a Christian has no right to take up the weapons of carnal warfare for *any* earthly consideration; yet we believe it our duty, as good citizens, "To be in subjection to the Powers that be," and as the exemption law both of the Confederate and State Governments omitted to make any provision for distraint where the tax was not paid, it seemed to present the subject in a manner very similar to that in which our Saviour directed the tribute money to be paid—"That we offend them not."

The Discipline of every Yearly Meeting of our Society prohibits its members from taking part in any way, in war; from mustering, or paying any fine imposed for not mustering, requiring its members, in all such cases, quietly to submit to any distraints for said fine, and prohibiting them from concealing their property, or in any way evading said laws.

We believe that the Constitution of Virginia does, in those clauses which secure to every man the right to worship God according to the dictates of his own conscience, afford ground for exemption to the members of our Society, as it is well known that we worship God not only as "Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father," but also as "The Prince of Peace." Therefore, a bill exempting those who worship him as the Prince of Peace, to wit: Friends and Dunkards, instead of

being unconstitutional, as the Governor suggests, would, it seems to us, only be a provision to carry out the great principle set forth in the Virginia Bill of Rights, section 16, viz: "That religion, or the duty which we owe to our Creator, and the manner of discharging it, can be directed only by reason and conviction, not by force or violence; and therefore all men are equally entitled to the free exercise of religion, according to the dictates of conscience; and that it is the mutual duty of all to practice Christian forbearance, love, and charity towards each other;" and we have come to ask Christian charity at your hands, because, while we judge not for others, for ourselves we believe, that by taking up the weapons of carnal warfare, even in the defence of our dearest rights, or life itself, we would endanger the welfare of our immortal souls. That belief is not original with us, as the following extracts will show:

The Bible, rather than any human authority, should be our guide; but, since the early Christians learned its meaning from the apostles themselves, or their immediate successors, we naturally wish to ascertain how they regarded the custom of war. Of their general views and practice on this point, there now remains little, if any doubt; for it is undeniable that, for a considerable period, so long indeed as the lamp of Christianity burnt pure and bright, they held it unlawful to bear arms, and actually abstained from war at the hazard of their lives; nor was it till the Church became corrupt, that her members began, without remorse or rebuke, to be soldiers. "It would be as easy," says a learned writer of the seventeenth century, "to obscure the sun at mid-day, as to deny that the primitive Christians renounced all revenge and war."

Justin Martyr, Tatian, Clemens of Alexandria, Tertullian, Cyprian, Lactantius, and a multitude of others among the early fathers, declared it unlawful for Christians to engage in war. It seems to have been for nearly three centuries the common sentiment, avowed and defended by the great champions of Christianity. Justin Martyr and Tatian spoke of soldiers and Christians as distinct characters; and Tatian says that the Christians declined even military commands.

Clemens of Alexandria calls his Christian contemporaries the "followers of peace," and expressly tells us "that the followers of peace used none of the implements of war." Lactantius says expressly, "It can never be lawful for a righteous man to go to war." About the end of the second century, Celsus, one of the opponents of Christianity, charged the Christians with refusing to bear arms even in cases of necessity. Origen, their defender, does not deny the fact; he admits the refusal, and justifies it on the ground that war is unlawful for Christians. Even after Christianity had spread over almost the whole known world, Tertullian, in speaking of a part of the Roman armies,



including more than one-third of the standing legions of Rome, distinctly informs us that "not a Christian could be found among them."

All this is explicit ; but the following facts are still more decisive : Some of the arguments which are now brought against the advocates of peace, were then urged against those early Christians ; and these arguments they examined and repelled. This indicates investigation, and manifests that their belief of the unlawfulness of war was not a vague opinion, hastily admitted, and loosely floating amongst them, but was the result of deliberate examination, and a consequent firm conviction that Christ had forbidden it. The very same arguments that are brought in defence of war at the present day, were brought against Christians sixteen hundred years ago, and were promptly repelled by them. It is remarkable, too, that Tertullian appeals to the precept from the Mount, as proving that the dispositions which these principles inculcate are not compatible with war, and that the custom, therefore, is irreconcilable with Christianity.

If it be possible, a still stronger evidence of the primitive belief is contained in the circumstance, that some of the Christian authors regarded the refusal of the Christians to bear arms, as a fulfillment of ancient prophecy. The peculiar strength of this evidence consists in this, that the fact of a refusal to bear arms is assumed as notorious and unquestioned. Irenæus, who lived about the year 180, affirms that the prophecy of Isaiah, which declares that men shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks, had been fulfilled in his time ; "for the Christians," says he, "have changed their swords and lances into instruments of peace, and they know not how to fight. Justin Martyr, his contemporary, writes "that the prophecy is fulfilled, you have good reason to believe ; for we who in times past killed one another, do not now fight with our enemies." Tertullian, who lived later, says : "You must confess that the prophecy has been accomplished, as far as the practice of every individual is concerned to whom it is applicable."

Martin, addressing the Emperor Julian, (A. D. 360,) declared that it was not lawful for him to fight, because he was a Christian ; and even so late as the middle of the fifth century, Leo the Pope declared it to be "contrary to the rules of the Church that persons, after the action of penance, (persons then considered to be pre-eminently bound to obey the law of Christ,) should revert to the warfare of the world."

Judson, the missionary of Burmah, says : "Since war has been universally advocated and applauded, it appears to me that it is not optional with any to remain neutral or silent on this great question ; since, thus remaining, they must be considered

as belonging of course, to the war party. Notwithstanding, therefore, I am a missionary, I have determined to make whatever efforts are necessary to comply with the dictates of conscience, and wash my hands of the blood that is shed in war. I regret that I have so long delayed to enter my protest against this practice by some overt act—a measure which appears, in the present state of things, the indispensable duty of every Christian.”

Jeremy Taylor says: “If men be subjects of Christ’s law, they can never go to war with each other.” Bishop Watson exclaims: “Would to God that the spirit of the Christian religion would exert its influence over the hearts of individuals in their public capacity, as much as we trust it does over their conduct in private life; then there would be no war.”

We might add testimonies from Cecil, Robert Hall, Chalmers, Wesley, and many others.

Even Gibbon bears his sneering testimony to the pacific scruples of the early Christians. He says: “The defence of our persons and property, they know not how to reconcile with the patient doctrine which enjoined an unlimited forgiveness of past injuries; nor could their humane ignorance be convinced that it was lawful, on any occasion, to shed the blood of our fellow creatures, by the sword either of justice or of war, though their criminal or hostile attempts should threaten the peace or safety of the whole community. The Christians felt and confessed, that such institutions might be necessary for the present system of the world, and they cheerfully submitted to the authority of their pagan governors; but while they inculcated the maxims of passive obedience,—submission, a very different thing,—they refused to take any active part in the civil administration or military defence of the empire.”

The above testimonies are all in accordance with the prophecies of the Old, and the precepts of the New Testament.

Isaiah and Malachi, almost in the same words, prophecy of our Saviour: “He shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people, and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning-hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.” David, in his last charge to Solomon, says: “The word of the Lord come to me saying thou shalt not build an house unto my name, because thou hast shed much blood upon the earth in my sight.” Chron. 22. 8. Again, in reference to Christ, Psalms 46th ch. 9th v.: “He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth, he breaketh the bow and cutteth the spear in sunder, he burneth the chariot in the fire.”

The advent of our blessed Saviour to the earth was announced, as Luke declares, 2d ch. 13-14 vs., “by a multitude of the heavenly hosts, praising God and saying, Glory to God in the high-

est, and on earth peace, good will toward men;" and He, in his memorable sermon on the mount, Mathew 5th ch., 38-39th vs., repealed the old law, of an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth, by the declaration, "I say unto you that ye resist not evil, but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. Again, verse 44th, "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you." And to Peter he said, Matthew 26. 57, "put up thy sword into his place, for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword."

For the badge of discipleship which he has left us—see John 13th ch., 35th v.—"by this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."

We have thus endeavored, in meekness, to render a reason of the hope that is in us, and trust that the honorable Legislature of Virginia will not in charity, be behind the Roman Government, which, under several consuls, allowed exemption to the Jews from military duty on account of their religious scruples, and seeing that we are a peaceable people, ever desiring to render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, we pray that we may be allowed the privilege, under the government of this noble old Commonwealth, which we honor and love, as loyal and true citizens should, to render unto God the things that are God's, according to the convictions of our consciences, and therefore pray that we may be required to perform no military duty; for we consider the throwing up of a battery, or the driving of an ammunition or other team, as much an act of war as fighting in the ranks.

We own no God but the God of Love, Truth, Peace, Mercy and Judgment, whose blessings we invoke, and whose wisdom we implore to be with you in your legislative deliberations.

Signed on behalf and by direction of Virginia Half Years' Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, held at Richmond, the 5th day of the 10th Month, 1863.

JOHN B. CRENSHAW, *Clerk.*



## A D D E N D U M .

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These principles of peace are also as safe for governments as they are for individuals.

We have a splendid instance of a Christian ruler supporting the purposes of government without resorting to war. The State of Pennsylvania was established under the dominion of the pious William Penn, and the government conducted by him and his successors for nearly seventy years, on the principles of Christianity: and so long as the members of his religious Society had the management of it, it was upheld without bloodshed, or any appeal to arms, although surrounded by barbarous and uncivilized Indians, and by colonists who had established themselves three-quarters of a century before. These colonists were often engaged in commotions with the native tenants of the soil, who were consequently murderously incensed against the white man. But these cruelly-treated aborigines were soon led to revere the name of *Onas*, as they designated Penn, in whom they found the true friend and just law-giver.

Wycliffe, the "morning star of the Reformation," says: "What honor falls to a knight that kills many men? The hangman killeth many more, and with a better title. Better were it for men to be butchers of beasts than butchers of their own brethren!"

Erasmus, who lived about 150 years after Wycliffe, wrote against war with unrivalled beauty and force. He says: "If there is in the affairs of mortal men any one thing which it is proper uniformly to deplore, and incumbent on every man by every lawful means to avoid, to deprecate, to oppose, that one thing is, doubtless, war. There is nothing more unnaturally wicked, more productive of misery, more extensively destructive, more obstinate in mischief, more unworthy of man, as formed by nature, much more of man professing Christianity. Yet, wonderful to relate, war is undertaken, and cruelly, savagely conducted, not only by unbelievers, but by (professing) Christians."

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